

Knowledge management, concepts with which the relevance of knowledge as a resource can be worked out in organizations. In the process, the employees' individual knowledge and skills, so-called human capital, is to be rooted systematically on the various levels of the organization's structure. The aim is to make knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing smoother within an enterprise. Concepts on knowledge management are particularly drawn up in business information technology, business management, computer science, and information science. The theory of knowledge management first appeared in the 1990s and has meanwhile become an indispensable discipline in complex enterprises.

Knowledge transfer

The encyclopaedic fragmentation of knowledge as theatre

Hannah Hurtzig

Hannah Hurtzig experiments with new forms of knowledge production and knowledge transfer in projects, workshops and readings. Gerlinde Schuller talked with her about her project Blackmarket for Useful Knowledge and Non-Knowledge which took place for the first time in Berlin in 2005.

Yesterday, the tenth Blackmarket was organized, this time in Vienna. What is the basic concept of these events and how has it changed over the years?

As 'Mobile Academy', we have always tried out various models of knowledge transfer in public space. These were always formats with a narrative form of knowledge transfer, and the issue was always narration in public space. But it was also about defining theatre as a space of debate in a different way and also going back to an ancient model of the theatre, the agora, where themes were publicly negotiated. At the Blackmarkets, clients can rent 100 experts and

acquire their knowledge in half an hour. The audience can watch these dialogues and listen to the different conversations via headsets. The idea developed out of a theatre space. Therefore, it is important for the Blackmarkets how the status of the audience is defined. We always present a space in which the theme is under observation, the theatre as an observation machine in which society can observe itself. In this case, a collective form of knowledge transfer based on dialogue. What is of interest is less which content is communicated than 'how' this content is communicated, in which form it is narrated. One can observe in these different conversations whether the dialogue is understood as a lecture and thus changes its character, or as a kind of interview situation that is balanced or not; how the partners share attention; how the expert and the client assert themselves; when the positions change; what it means to negotiate knowledge in a dialogue.

Every viewer can individually experience these processes in this theatrical observation machine of the Blackmarket in a space with a fragmented economy of attention. It is also a space that constitutes itself in its diversity and its inability to be resolved and designated via collective silence and listening, because one naturally doesn't know who is listening to which dialogue when and with what intention. Yesterday evening, around 750 people were there. At the same time, the space seems to float, because this crowd is undirected and ungraspable. Therefore, you suddenly have a situation in which the crowd does not possess a heaviness but lightness.

The 100 experts sit with their clients on a kind of stage in the middle of the space. Why is this element so important for the mise-en-scène?

It's not really a stage but an arena. The stage and the auditorium are moments that reflect each other. In the Blackmarkets, there is an arena where the surrounding audience can observe in real time what is taking place in the middle. It is similar to the ancient arena where there was only the round on which the chariots drove and where the audience watched this event in real time. The segment of the stage that was cut out of this is a total innovation, because it means that the spectator's view is directed to one place and the actors have the possibility of appearing and disappearing, meaning that they can be present and absent.

With the Blackmarkets, we again create this round, in this case the round of narration that is then observed in real time by the persons surrounding it.

You choose the locations in such a way that the aspect of arena always functions. What are other recurring elements of the Blackmarkets?

It must always be possible in the spatial situation that the observers' views can cross and that there are different, if possible rising, views of the location from above.

The content, meaning the script of the event, has the form of an encyclopaedia. Each Blackmarket has a theme that is split into headwords by the narration of 100 persons with their expertises.

The entire structure of the evening is encyclopaedic. The clients orient themselves in the program using headwords from A-Z; that defines the seating plan and the course of events. The theme is thus diversified. The encyclopaedia is a very easily comprehensible form of structuring, but the way we use it, it is also an encyclopaedia hallucinating itself, proliferating, becoming monstrous and then dissolving again. The encyclopaedic character determines the form, but it dissolves again from the inside.

Trading knowledge, the market situation also appears to be an important basic element.

Yes, because in the Blackmarket, two models interact, that of the archive and that of the market. One wanders through the day and through

life searching for knowledge, one uses Google and tries to piece together and collect expertise. That's also how one moves about in the Blackmarket evening.

The theme of the Blackmarket in Vienna was 'Who will have been to blame'. After two crimes of violence in Austria, the theme of guilt is currently being debated heatedly in the international media. To what extent are popular themes and good timing important for the success of your event?

We seek the themes for each city in discussions with theorists and friends. Together with them, we establish which themes are presently being debated. It's different in each country and sometimes even from city to city. We do not necessarily look for a theme that is high up in the discourse machinery. Instead, we search for a theme that has in one way or another already fallen prey to popularisation. A theme that we assume is time-specific. In the end, we simply claim that a theme exists that is of special interest in this city. We don't shy away from triviality either.

The theme of guilt in Vienna is obviously a good theme, even though one could say that it possesses a certain folkloristic character. But that's not so important for the Blackmarket, since the theme is split up anyway. This again makes it complicated and inconsistent in itself, so that as far as the title is concerned, we don't have to be overly sensitive – which we then of course are during our preliminary work. The theme of guilt is a good one in Austria, and it attains a special wittiness in the elegant question posed in the future perfect tense, 'Who will have been to blame', making it interesting for people to think about a future perfect.



Unloading guilt is forbidden!
Blackmarket for Useful Knowledge
and Non-Knowledge, Vienna, 2008

How long before the event is the theme of a Blackmarket determined?

As early as possible. About a year ago, we started thinking about what the theme for Vienna could be. We look for three to four times more experts than we ultimately need. We then meet the one hundred experts coming into question for one to two-hour personal conversations. Then we consider what their specific theme could be and which headword and title it is given. The concrete preliminary work and looking for the experts takes four months. It is an 'anti-curatorial' process, since we do not predetermine the experts. We let a network gradually evolve out of itself and then we look into the information and references given to us. The more time we have, the better, because a network structure can then develop and begin to live on its own.

In how far is it your aim to cover the theme as completely as possible?

Not at all. We don't want completeness but monstrosity and surprise. A 'Wunderkammer' for a theme.

The knowledge traded at a Blackmarket is more than just interdisciplinary. Beside personal experiences, the issue is sometimes non-knowledge, non-recognized or secret knowledge. I listened to a discussion yesterday that ended in a date. Another one was more like a free legal consultation. What forms of knowledge transfer have resulted that surprised you?

Because it is a process of narration and dialogue, we can't and don't want to control it. The dialogue is about negotiating what an expert is and what a client is. The way in which this is negotiated – whether the expert is accepted as a lecturer and initially put to the test, whether clients believe they must use the expert to explain problems of their own, whether the conversation takes place in the form of a confession or a psychoanalytical session, a flirt or a job interview – depends on how these two persons negotiate. Everything has already happened. It is indeed the case that the expert actually wants to impart his or her knowledge. The extent to which he or she can do so, must be negotiated by both parties in this half hour. The flush of the evening results from a precisely set structure, which simultaneously opens the floodgates to unpredictability however.

So you set the framework conditions and then trigger a chain reaction that you no longer control.

It is in any case something that evolves out of itself based on a script, similar a theatre play. In this case, the script is spoken live for the first time by many different voices.

How do you plan such a multi-layered and complex script?

You observe existing structures and bring them together in a new space, in this case the theatre space. If you take the individual elements of the Blackmarket apart, there is nothing mysterious about them anymore, they are not invented with a claim to be highly original. 'Standing in a queue' or 'sitting opposite each other' in a consultation situation are everyday situations. And that, as a neoliberal individual and self-entrepreneur, one must organize knowledge on one's own and must also know which knowledge needs to be combined, are all situations one is familiar with. All these elements are layered in a Blackmarket, resulting in a model space.

On the one hand, this is a metaphor of a space of teaching and learning, but at the same time, in view of its individual components, it is something that can be easily handled and understood.

The main emphasis of the Blackmarket is on personal dialogue. Is dialogue the most effective form of knowledge transfer in your view?

No, that needn't be the case at all. It does make sense for the Blackmarket, because we want



Encyclopaedia of subjects

Banking
Blues
Classics
Climate
Contractual Law
Copyright
Corruption
Cybernetics
Dystopia
Ecology
Economics
Exchange and Guilt
Relations
Forgiveness
Future Scenarios
Future II
Ghosts
Justice
Law
Media
Mobility
Oblivionism
Original Sin
Repolitization
Responsibility
Restitution
Scapegoat
Science Fiction
Sexuality
Shame
Songs
Truth/Fake
Victimology
Vienna
War
Women
Working Conditions



Who will have been to blame
Blackmarket for Useful Knowledge and
Non-Knowledge, Vienna, 2008

to reflect on the fragmentation of themes and because we quite frequently have to do with persons who don't like appearing as lecturers. Many experts find themselves in consultation situations during their work and have somebody sitting across the table from them. Nevertheless, the dialogical conversation is this minor form, a very dangerous manner of communication.

Yesterday there was an actress who during her conversation occasionally rode a bike. Do you also experiment with dissolving the dialogue form?

Yes, we built that in to make it even more complex. We always find one or two performing experts. But the Blackmarket is not a dance performance.

To what extent is the Blackmarket concept a formula that large companies could apply for knowledge management, for instance?

There have indeed already been requests from large companies, but we didn't find them interesting. What large companies generally have in the back of their minds is to improve the communication structures in their firms, and that is not our primary interest. Ours is, for one thing, a thematic one, meaning to open up a theme in all its narrative diversity. And then we are interested in observing. But we are not really interested in enhancing communication.

The Blackmarket is not about a didactic procedure. It is a production of four months and one night, a performance that goes up in smoke in one evening. For me, it is still a theatre event.

Is the Blackmarket concept often copied?

Some people ask, others just copy it, and some take parts of the Blackmarket and use them in another context. There are now also conferences that work in this way. Of course, we could apply for a copyright of the Blackmarket concept, but I never considered doing so. Instead, I'm interested in observing the scene I work in – how does someone copy, who is it and what for, and how does it then turn out.

Where will the next Blackmarkets take place?

There are requests from Jerusalem, Dresden, Liverpool, and Hamburg. But we also issue Blackmarket licenses. This means that persons receive a license from us that contains a specific training offer and all the expertises on how a Blackmarket takes place, the practicability, the type of bureaucratization and listings.

Our experienced hostesses are partially engaged for the evening event, because that is very difficult to train. There are also a few rules regarding the search for experts that must be observed. But with the license, people purchase a complete package, so to say, with which they can organize a Blackmarket on their own.

What new projects on the theme of knowledge transfer are you currently planning?

A new project is the 'Future Perfect Advice Bureau'. It evolved out of the Blackmarkets, but it is a more precise investigation of the micro-structure of communication. Here, there are also experts and clients. The experts make an assessment together with the clients, in the way a fortune-teller, someone reading the cards, or a palmist would do.

The clients meet fortune-telling experts who recall their present looking back from the future and offering them advice on important questions and aspects of their current situation in life that has yet to produce their future, for example on 'What will I not have done?', 'How I will have loved' and 'Where I will have travelled'. It is a minimal, experimental situation taking place in a small studio that looks like a private investigator's office.

A private investigator also attempts to see into the future by looking to the past in order to find a criminal. The conversations are recorded with cameras and transmitted to another room. In this room there are viewing points

where the conversations can be watched.

To what extent do you use the Internet as a knowledge pool?

I couldn't do the Blackmarket events without the Internet. It would be unimaginable to find 400 people in such a short time without the Internet.

I constantly use everything I can in any way get from the Internet. But I also love all forms of dictionaries and encyclopaedias.

The Blackmarket also possesses elements of the Internet.

Definitely. I believe that people can make use of the Blackmarket so well because they use the Internet. They have made the experience of speed and of becoming involved. Zapping is one possibility of reflecting on a theme, but it is best combined with moments of 'standing still'.

The Blackmarket also resembles the knowledge portal Wikipedia, where one can retrieve knowledge but also contribute one's own knowledge.

Yes, that's true. The comparison is often made and it is indeed permissible.

In face of the abundance of knowledge on the Internet, sorting according to personal criteria is still problematic. Search engines are only a partial help, since in the worst case one still has to struggle through hundreds of search results. Is the Blackmarket concept an example of a high-quality, personified filter mechanism, something that is still missing on the Internet?

That's an interesting question. It is probably rather the difficulty and the impossibility of it.

Working out a Blackmarket system requires 'encyclopaedic thinking'. What is your understanding of this?

To interleave a theme in subsections, to split it up, to metaphorize it, and to stigmatize it. That means to transmogrify a theme and always look at new facets of it, to explicate a morphology of the theme.

Why can you do this so well?

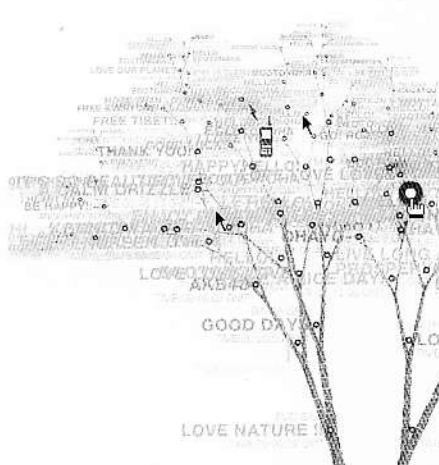
I'm crazy about all forms of encyclopaedias. In the evening before I go to bed, I read in dictionaries or look at product catalogues, which are

also full of small systems. I have always been interested in archives as well.

For a long time, the highest goal of educated people was to become a homo universalis, a universal scholar who combines knowledge from different disciplines. How do you picture the universal scholar of the future?

Could the universal scholar today be replaced by the dilettante? A collective dilettantism as the substitute of the individual universal scholar?

The interview was conducted in Vienna (AT) on May 18, 2008.



Ecotonoha - virtual tree
NEC Corporation, 2004

Knowledge tree, 1. religion: The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was a tree in the Garden of Eden in the Bible's story of Paradise. God forbade Adam and Eve to eat its fruits which are usually apples in visual representations of the story. Yet Eve was tempted by a snake to eat the fruit, leading to the couple's expulsion from Paradise.

2. science: The form of a tree with many branches is used in representation of the evolution and to visualize complex knowledge. The tree structure with roots as the starting point and the endless possibilities of ramification allow a natural and easily comprehensible representation of complex hierarchies.

Universal manipulation